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BORN OF THE YOGINĪ'S HEART: REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF MEDITATION AND RITUAL IN ABHINAVAGUPTA'S PTLV

Paul E. Muller-Ortega
Department of Religious Studies
304 Linton Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1044

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I. Introduction

In his massive study entitled Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study, K.C. Pandey recounts the traditional story which has it that Abhinavagupta was never seen to die, but rather disappeared along with twelve hundred disciples into a cave in the mountains. The passage reads as follows:

> Unlike what has been written so far, we have no other authority than that of tradition for what we are going to write in the following few lines. We have not so far been able to trace any written authority on which this may have been originally based. The tradition, which, as we pointed out before, is current not only in the old Pandit families but also in some of the old Muslim houses in the locality, says that on one day Abhinavagupta, after finishing his work, as he thought, along with twelve hundred disciples walked into the Bhairava cave and was never seen again. The cave is there even now. It is about five miles from Magam, a place midway between Srinagar and Gulmurg. A village in its neighbourhoood and a brook running down below the hill, wherein the cave is, both are known by the name Bhīruvā, and so is the cave itself. The writer visited the locality and went into the cave also... Down the hill was accidentally seen a religious minded and long bearded Mohammedan, bent double with age, slowly walking reclining on his slender stick. He was approached and questioned if he knew or had heard anything about the cave. The only information, that he could give was: "I heard from my grand father that Abnācarī went into it along with twelve hundred disciples but never did return."[1]

This fragment is important to the Historian of Religion whether it is "historically" accurate or not. Indeed, we

might almost be tempted to doubt its historical accuracy precisely because it fits so neatly into the symbolic matrix of Abhinavagupta's thought. The notion of disappearing into the cave links the themes of the cave or abyss (guha), with the traditional symbolism of the cave of the Heart (hṛdaya).[2] The claims made in the passage concerning Abhinavagupta's supernatural transcendence of the human condition, his apparent bypassing of the usual passage into death, denote precisely his perceived status as an accomplished mahāsiddha, a perfected one who has captured the cave of the Heart, the abode of Bhairava, the sky of consciousness itself. He is one who has consciously and directly reentered the primordial source.

This myth-fragment, which has survived for almost a millenium maintained by local Kashmiri tradition, points directly to the central symbolic complex associated with Abhinavagupta's tantric formulations: to enter the heart-cave is to unite with the Goddess; to enter the heart-cave is to ascend to the most exalted level of consciousness, to return to the Goddess who is the creative power and the existential matrix of that consciousness. A dense network of symbolic equivalences is to be found here. To return to the cave is to attain

immortality. To reenter the secret heart of things is to drink of the enlivening and immortalizing soma which, since the time of Indra and the slaying of Vṛtra, is contained in a huge vat, a cup, a chalice.[3] This container in turn becomes the crescent moon, the womb of the Goddess, of the Yoginī, exuding life-giving secretions, all of which are linked with the cave of consciousness from which trickles the flow of life-giving waters.[4] Abhinavagupta consciously reenters the cave with his disciples, the cave in which, since the time of the Veda, the cows were hidden and then released by the masterful King of the Gods, Indra.[5] To reenter the cave is to achieve physical immortality, to bypass the normal process of death. To reenter the cave is to journey to the moon (soma), which is not made of cheese, but of a fiery, nacreous, congealed liquid, the soma, cold and sweet to the taste.[6] To reenter the cave is to undertake a magical flight through the void, to move in the void (khecarī), to reenter the pulsating darkness, to reintegrate consciously with the creative matrix of the universe, and thus experience the ecstasy of the liberated being vibrating in the emissional power (visarga-śakti).[7]

The density and complexity of the symbolism of the

Heart escapes our capacity to transcribe it into language. We begin with an apparently minor and unsubstantiated myth-fragment, the entry into the Bhairava cave. Then, just as when we idly pull at a loose thread in a piece of clothing and watch as part of the garment unravels, so, when we tug gently on this myth-fragment, the entire framework of Śaiva tantric symbolism threatens to become a pile of thread at our feet. The densely woven tantric symbolism of Abhinavagupta's thought can be entered into by this apparently inconsequential tale. We want to examine the "garment" of the Heart, but we must realize that these linear explications of the Historian of Religion, finally do not capture the dense weaving of the Tantra itself in which all meanings are juxtaposed simultaneously.

The basis of this paper is a recent translation and study of the Parātrīśikā-laghuvṛtti (PTlv) of Abhinavagupta.[8] In a recently completed study of this text entitled The Triadic Heart of Śiva, Kaula Tantricism in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Shaivism, I explored the concept of the Heart (hṛdaya) as forming the central symbolic focus for the tantric sādhana prescribed by the great Kashmiri Shaivite master of the tenth century. As the primary textual focus of this study I presented a

translation of Abhinavagupta's Parātrīsikā-laghuvṛtti (PTlv), the Short Gloss on the Supreme, the Queen of the Three. The PTlv is a relatively short tantric manual composed sometime around the beginning of the eleventh century. It represents perhaps the most concise statement on the nature of tantric sādhana by this outstanding Shaiva master of medieval Kashmir. Abhinavagupta, considered the pre-eminent exponent of the group of traditions which has come to be loosely termed Kashmir Shaivism, presents in this text a self-sufficient path towards liberation based on a repose (viśrānti) or absorption (samāveśa) into the triple Heart of Śiva, the ultimate reality.

In my study of this text, I argued that the PTlv gives us direct access to the theoretical and practical bases of one of the most obscure yet influential lineages in the history of medieval "Hinduism": the Kaulas.[9] This lineage, which is neither properly a "school," nor a separate "tradition," contributes most directly to tantric formulations focusing on "transgressive sacrality." The Kaula lineage, within which this text may be placed, taught a method of spontaneous and increasingly effortless entrance into the triple Heart, known as the Śāmbhavopāya, the method relating to Śambhu. By means of this advanced

tantric discipline, the sādhaka could replicate the reality of the Heart in his own consciousness and attain freedom-in-life (jīvanmukti), a state of embodied perfection (kaulikī-siddhi), often known as the condition of Bhairava.[10]

In addition, in my study I attempted to show that the Kaula emphasis on the direct and unmediated experience of the reality of Śiva as symbolized by the Heart, provides a key entry-point into an understanding of the tantric worldview, generally, and the theoretical formulations of Abhinavagupta, specifically. My study and translation of the PTlv aimed at reconstructing a coherent understanding of the Kaula lineage by examining a key term: hṛdayaṅgamībhūta, literally: "become something that moves in the Heart," that is to say, conscious realization or, more interpretively, "experiential replication."[11] This important concept was explored in relation to two other crucial ideas presented in the PTlv, the visarga-śakti: the emissional power of Śiva, and the kula: the embodied cosmos.[12]

Abhinavagupta (ca. 950-1014 C.E.) was a Kashmiri brahmin who is still probably best known for his contributions to the development of Indian aesthetic theory, particularly the exploration of the concepts of

rasa and dhvani.[13] However, as a result of the recent work of several scholars including Pandey in India, Gnoli in Italy, and Padoux and Silburn in France, the extent of his contributions to the development of the Hindu tantra are finally emerging.[14] He is usually counted as being the most illustrious representative of the tradition called, for want of a better appellation, simply Kashmir Shaivism.[15] This rather imprecise term refers to several related lineages of Northern Shaiva masters which include Vasugupta (ca. 9th cent.), transmitter of the foundational text known as the Śiva-sūtra-s; his disciple Kallaṭa, to whom are usually attributed the important Spanda-kārikā-s; Somānanda, also ninth century, author of the influential text known as the Śiva-dṛṣṭi, and his disciple Utpalācarya author of what has come to be recognized as the foundational text for the philosophical explication of the tradition, the Īśvara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā-s.[16] In addition to these important intellectual forebears, the tradition which Abhinavagupta inherits, and comes eventually to synthesize, includes powerful influences from a number of celebrated āgamic śāstra-s. Of these, the Mālinī-vijaya-tantra is usually considered the most authoritative.[17] Abhinavagupta studied these āgamic texts with his Kaula master, Śambhunātha, and dedicates a large

portion of his writings to an explication of the then developing Hindu Tantra, including the lineage of the Kaulas.[18]

The PTlv may be grouped with four other texts in which Abhinavagupta explores this tantric environment. These are his encyclopedia of tantra entitled Tantrāloka; a short summary of the TĀ, known as the Tantrasāra; a long text, the Parātrimśikā-vivaraṇa which comments on the same āgamic verses commented on in the PTlv, and the Mālinī-vijaya-vārtika. It is in the PTlv, however, that Abhinavagupta presents the most concise statement on the nature of the tantric sādhana.[19]

In the Tantrāloka[20], Abhinavagupta reserves the highest praise for his teacher Śambhunātha,[21] a master of the Kaula lineage who lived in Jālandhara (in the Panjāb). Abhinavagupta, who traveled from Kashmir to study with this teacher, tells us that it was the initiation that he received from Śambhunātha that finally led him to enlightenment.[22]

It is no accident, then, that the Kaula lineage holds pride of place in the tantric writings of Abhinavagupta. This tradition, whose name may be translated as the lineage of the Embodied Cosmos, teaches that the ultimate reality is the Heart. According to the

tradition, the Heart is the Supreme (anuttara); it is the very self of Śiva, of Bhairava, and of the Devī, the Goddess who is inseparable from Śiva.[23] Indeed, the Heart is the site of their union (yāmala), of their embrace (saṃghaṭṭa). This abode is pure consciousness (caitanya), as well as unlimited bliss (ānanda).

As consciousness, the Heart is the unbounded, infinite light (prakāśa), and the freedom (svātantrya) and spontaneity (vimarśa) of that light to appear in a multitude and variety of forms. The Heart is the sacred fire-pit of Bhairava.[24]

The interesting feature of the Śāmbhavopāya lies in its utter simplicity. It presents a shortcut to freedom which sidesteps the enormous complexity of the meditation and ritual practices that had developed at this time. In order to follow this path the sādhaka needed only to obtain initiation into the Heart-mantra. This mantra, which may be transcribed as S-AU-Ḥ,[25] would lead him to be "born of the yoginī" (yoginījāta).[26] Abhinavagupta clarifies that "being born of the yoginī" means that the sādhaka obtains a descent of the energy (śaktipāta) which abides in the Heart united with Śiva, and which will open his vision to the Self. This is the powerfully liberating force variously known as the kaulikī śakti, the power that

rules the embodied cosmos, visarga, the emissional power, or simply Devī, Goddess.[27]

In the brief compass of this essay I want to explore a puzzling feature of the teachings presented in the PTlv. There appears to be a discrepancy between Abhinavagupta's formulations about the Śāmbhavopaya and other statements he makes about the efficacy and importance of ritual. The streamlined path to liberation presented by Abhinavagupta in the PTlv claims to dispense entirely with the need for ritual. In order to understand the theoretical framework within which the claims that Abhinavagupta makes in the PTlv become meaningful, I will first examine the notion of the Heart of Śiva in more detail. The central concept of visarga will then be considered. Following this, the complex of ideas surrounding the notions of experiential replication will be analyzed. We will then have sufficiently delineated the conceptual framework necessary to understand the claims made by Abhinavagupta in the the PTlv about the relationship between ritual and meditation.

II. THE HEART OF ŚIVA

The Heart is the Ultimate (anuttara) which is both utterly transcendent to (viśvottīrṇa) and yet totally immanent in (viśvamaya) all created things. It is the ultimate essence (sāra). Thus, the Heart embodies the paradoxical nature of Śiva and is therefore a place of astonishment (camatkāra), sheer wonder (vismaya), and ineffable mystery. The Heart is the fullness and unboundedness of Śiva (pūrṇatva), the plenum of being that overflows continuously into manifestation. At the same time, it is also an inconceivable emptiness (śūnyātiśūnya).[1] The Heart is the unbounded and universal Self (pūrṇāhantā).

The Heart of Śiva is not a static or inert absolute however. In fact, the Kashmir Shaiva tradition considers it to be in a state of perpetual movement, a state of vibration (spanda)[2] in which it is continuously contracting and expanding (saṃkoca-vikāsa), opening and closing (unmeṣa-nimeṣa), trembling (ullasitā), quivering (sphuritā), throbbing, waving, and sparkling (ucchalatā). The intensity and speed of this movement is such that paradoxically it is simultaneously a perfect dynamic stillness.[3]

The tradition states that the Heart is the enormous

ocean (ambunidhi), the ocean of light, the ocean of consciousness. The waters of consciousness which in man are broken by countless polarizing (vikalpa) and divisive waves (ūrmi) may be easily brought to a state of dynamic stillness by the process of immersion or absorption (samāveśa) in the Heart.[4]

The perpetual effervescence, ebullition, and incandescence at the center (madhya) of Śiva's being provides the motor, as it were, that drives the entire process of manifestation;[5] or, as Abhinavagupta terms it, of emission (visarga), of the entire universe. Equally important, through the medium of the empowered mantra the power (śakti) that resides in the Heart, provides the possibility of a return to Śiva, which is to say, the possibility of enlightenment. Thus, this power in the Heart, which is the Goddess, is at once centrifugal (pravṛtti), that is, emissional and expansive, as well as centripetal (nivṛtti), that is, absorptive and unitive.[6] This centripetal motion of the Goddess resides in man as the kuṇḍalinī energy that impels one back to the source and center of one's being in a completely natural and spontaneous (sahaja) way.

Abhinavagupta identifies the Goddess in the Heart with the Supreme Word (parā-vāk), the transcendent

sounding of the motor of being, the primordial roar (*nāda*) of the fiery waters.[7] This Supreme Word, while ultimately beyond any of the combinations of human speech, may be transcribed on the gross level by one of several *mantra*-s: *OṂ*, *AHAM*, *SAUḤ*. These and other *mantra*-s, when properly empowered (*mantravīrya*) by the awakened life-force (*prāṇa*)[8] and the consciousness of the *guru*, and properly employed by the receptive disciple, engage the centripetal motion of the Heart. The fragmented and restless mind is thus calmed, awakened, and intensified by the *mantra* which, tending automatically to move to its own source, discovers the fullness and unboundedness of the Heart.[9] There the disciple will hear the Supreme Word as the unstruck (*anāhata*) sound of the Heart which is the universal life force or cosmic breath (*prāṇa*).[10]

The mysterious triad of sun (*sūrya*), moon (*soma*), and fire (*agni*) are said to abide in the Heart in a state of perfect equilibrium.[11] On one level, these represent the interior cosmos of the process of knowing, the object of knowledge, and the knowing subject. However, a more complex homology is at work here. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, so the Heart of Śiva, the Goddess as moon, expands and contracts through the fifteen days (*tithi*) of the lunar fortnight.[12] Continuing the linguistic

ananlogy, each day or station is assigned one of the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet.[13] The sixteenth vowel--visarga--, emissional aspiration--Ḥ, is said to inhere generically in the preceding fifteen. Because of the double meaning of the word soma as moon and as the ambrosial nectar, this sixteenth vowel links the emission of the union of Śiva and Śakti with the water of immortality which slowly drips and trickles form the moon, from the Heart.[14]

This spring of nectar streams in the Heart which is the secret cave (guha), the endless abyss or chasm, the mysterious opening (yoni) in the body of the Goddess which gives birth to the entire universe.[15] This creative matrix or void is also, by a double meaning of the word kha: cavity, hollow; space, air; the sky (cidambara), the ether (ākāśa) of consciousness. Thus, the highest spiritual attainment possible to man is termed khecarī, that is, moving freely in the sky of consciousness.[16]

What is the meaning of the assertion that the liṅga is the very Heart of the yoginī, the yoginīhṛdaya? This rather mysterious statement links the most common emblem of Śiva, the liṅga or phallic mark, with the Heart. It refers to the union of the liṅga, the phallic pillar of light, with the guha, the vaginal abyss of darkness, a

union which occurs in the Heart.

The notion of the liṅga in the Heart may be read in at least three ways. On the cosmic level, the liṅga is the massed and powerful consciousness of Śiva as he is about to release the universe into manifestation.[17] We recognize here the emissional power of Śiva which, continuously expanding and contracting, releases into being the seed-cognitions it harbors within itself. On another level, that of the yogic practice, the liṅga in the Heart alludes to the practice of meditative absorption into the cave (guha). Thus, we might initially read this process as guha-samāveśa--absorption into the cave, where that phrase yields a dual meaning. On the inner level of tantric practice, it may be interpreted as alluding to the yogic immersion in the cave of consciousness. On the external level of tantric ritual, it may be seen as describing the ritualistic penetration of the phallus into the vaginal cave. This superimposition of meanings, it need hardly be said, is not accidental. Thus the yoginī, the Goddess, is penetrated by Śiva, has Śiva as her very Heart, has Śiva in her very core. Bhairava is the self of the Goddess, he is inseparable from her, he is perpetually united to her.[18] Just as the Heart is said to harbor in its depths the unstruck sound, so the liṅga proclaims the

withheld and unemitted semen of Śiva, of the yogin, the transmuted semen that permits the activation of the the Goddess in the form of the kuṇḍalinī, and the emission of the soma within the Heart.[19]

The mutual sexual knowledge of the God and Goddess in the Heart is productive, on the human level, of spiritual knowledge. A common theme which introduces many tantric works is the plea for knowledge made by the Devī to Śiva. The God, after cautioning the Goddess not to reveal the secret teaching he is about to impart to any but the most worthy disciples, proceeds to explain his true nature to the Goddess. In addition, he reveals the method or means to be used to attain Him.[20] It is not surprising that the Heart, which is the abode and source of all, is lauded as the source of this transcendental wisdom as well. Śiva as the great Yogin stands in the Heart as the supreme teacher. Abhinavagupta often extols Maheśvara in the Heart as the teacher from whom he learned the particular yogic and tantric methods which he explains in his texts.[21] In this same vein, the authoriative and revealed scriptures, the āgama-s are said to be the mere throbbing of the Heart.[22]

Another important theme associates the Heart and the lotus flower (padma, ambhoja). Bhairava is said to

reside in the lotus of the Heart in the form of bliss and consciousness, while the sense-goddesses (indriya-devī-s) perpetually worship him by offering up the enjoyments of the sense objects. The Heart-lotus is said to have eight petals each facing one of the cardinal points of the compass. Important evidence that the Heart as it is here conceived does not refer to the fourth or anāhata cakra of the esoteric yogic physiology is the fact that this latter cakra is usually described as having twelve petals. Interestingly, the names of the sense-goddesses bear a curious resemblance to traditional lists of the Seven Mothers (sapta-mātṛkā-s). However, Abhinavagupta has here expanded the list from seven to eight: Brahmaṇi, E; Śāmbhavī, SE; Kumarī, S; Vaiṣṇavī, SW; Vārāhī, W; Indrāṇi, NW; Cāmundā, N; Mahālakṣmī, NE. We know that the number eight is doubly sacred to Śiva as it enumaerates the eight faces of Śiva (aṣṭa mūrti), and is also the sume of five and three, both of which numbers have many associations to Śiva and Shaivism.[23]

The number three brings us to the last and perhaps most important theme associated with the Heart, the Heart as triangle (trikoṇa).[24] This initially puzzling association links one of the names for the tradition, Trika or triple, with its most important symbol, the

Heart. In fact, one of the important texts quoted by Abhinavagupta in his TĀ is entitled the Trika-hṛdaya.[25] There is a deeper meaning lurking here, however. We have alluded to the identification of the Heart with the cave or abyss (guha). We have also seen the link made between the cave, the Heart, and the female sexual organ. It happens that in the Śāradā script, in which almost all of the manuscripts of Kashmir were written, the vowel "E" looks very much like an isoceles triangle with its apex pointing downwards.[26] This emblematic association with the female sexual organ causes the vowel "E" to become known as the trikoṇa-bīja triangle-vowel, or yoni-bīja vagina-vowel. The Heart, the triangle, the yoni, and the vowel "E", are all linked with the Goddess, with the śakti, with the female power of sexuality, fertility, and reproduction.[27]

III. THE GODDESS IN THE HEART: VISARGA

In this section I would like to examine a single, though crucial, aspect of this Kaula method: the concept of *visarga*,[1] which is most commonly encountered in Sanskrit phonology as naming the pure, voiceless aspiration.[2] The notion of the *visarga* is deeply connected with the theoretical bases of the *Shaiva Tantra*. Abhinavagupta devotes a large portion of the *PTlv* to an extended discourse on the nature of *visarga*. The following are two crucial passages from that text detailing the nature of the *visarga*.

> The power (*śakti*) which resides in the Heart of consciousness is freedom itself. The purpose of its creative activity is the embodied cosmos (*kula*), the entire range of perceiving subject, perceived object, and process of perception. Thus She is called *Kaulinī*. She is the Noble Lady, the Mistress (*Nāyikā*) of that Embodied Cosmos, She rules over it. By knowing it, She causes its manifestation, as well as reabsorbing it in Herself.[3]

> Now, it is well known that perception here is just the illumination of the objective world, which, by nature, is divided up into two groups, namely the knowing subjects and the knowable objects. The knowing subject

has as its essence the supremely subtle vibration of the Self. It is characterized by knowledge and action, and its nature is one of contraction and expansion, that is, opening and closing. It is not like a pot, and so on, which is inert, limited and stationary. The more this combination of expansion and contraction becomes evident in the vibration of the Heart, of the triangle etc., the more does the subjectivity become elevated, until it reaches the consciousness of Bhairava. Conversely, the more the expansion and contraction diminish, the more does the subjectivity fall until it becomes inert like a stone etc. This expansion and contraction is the characteristic of the visarga, whose essence is freedom, that is, the very Power of the Lord, of the Ultimate (anuttara). Therefore, the phoneme "Ḥ", the visarga, is termed the Rudra-yāmala, the Rudra-Dyad, because it consists of both the Supreme Śiva and Śakti, of the rest and activity which constitute the union of Bhairava with his Beloved.[4]

In Abhinavagupta's teachings about the Kaula method, the term visarga has a wide signification. Here, it comes to name that power (śakti) (known alternatively as the kaulikī-śakti, the Devī, the nāda) which is

responsible for emitting the universe in all its glorious variety. Equally important, it names the power which must be harnessed by the tantric yogin to continue the arc of manifestation as it doubles back on the journey of return to Śiva. This power may be thought of as an impelling force (icchā-śakti), that at one and the same time continuously pushes everything out into being, and continuously absorbs it all back into Śiva. Thus, this power in the Heart, which is the Goddess, and which is named the visarga, is at once centrifugal (pravṛtti), that is, emissional and expansive, as well as centripetal (nivṛtti), that is, absorptive and unitive.[5]

This expansion and contraction (saṃkoca-vikāsa) forms a kind of "alternating current" of spiritual power which may be tapped by the yogin in various ways. The "expansive" mode may be employed for the further manifestation of desires in the external or subtle worlds (bhoga, phala), or, during the farther reaches of the sādhana, for the establishment of the experience of non-duality even in outward perceptions. The "contractive" mode connects the yogin to the inwardly ascending force that effortlessly propels the yogin to rest in absorption (samāveśa-viśrānti) in his own unbounded, original consciousness. Here, the infinitely fast vibration

(spanda) of consciousness allows the re-emergence of the state of Bhairava, the state of liberation in this very life. In the dialectic of reversal characteristic of the visarga the "expansive" mode mentioned above may, from another perspective, be termed "contractive" and vice-versa.

Abhinavagupta calls the visarga the Rudra-dyad. On one level, the double nature of the visarga clearly reflects its graphic representation in the Śāradā script: two dots placed vertically one above the other, sometimes accompanied by a straight vertical line just to the left of the two dots. The single dot, bindu, which is the phoneme that just precedes the visarga in the enumeration of the vowels, is said to represent the finite, knowing subject (vedaka).[6] The visarga, which is made up of two bindu-s, represents the inherently self-referential capacity of consciousness.[7] It is in this sense that the visarga represents the freedom of consciousness, the vimarśa, which is the most important characteristic of consciousness. Consciousness is not like a rock crystal which passively reflects all that appears before it. Rather, the freedom and spontaneity present in consciousness, allow for a continuous process of self-consciousness (svasamvedana) as well. The visarga

represents the basic component of the _sādhana_ in which the finite consciousness is doubled back on itself. At first, as this process proceeds, consciousness simply encounters more and more of its own contents. Finally, there occurs the powerful moment of recognition (_pratyabhijñā_), when the beam of consciousness becomes conscious of itself and nothing else. This is termed the entrance into the "Fourth", _turīya_, and here the condition of simple _nirvikalpa_ ensues.

The _visarga_, which is tentatively translated as the "emissional power," brings together all the various levels of the tantric cosmos: the divine level of outward cosmic manifestation, the human level of inward spiritual absorption, and the ritual level on which the human becomes divine. In terms of language, the _visarga_ functions both as a phoneme, the outwardly explosive aspiration of breath, and as a component of numerous _mantra_-s, where its function is rather to cause the inward cessation of the vital breath. On the level of ritual, it resonates with the _kula-yāga_, the secret ritual taught in veiled terms by Abhinavagupta, where it may signify the orgasmic expulsion of the life force; or, on the level of inner, tantric yoga which is part of the same ritual, it coincides with the blissful inward force, the _kuṇḍalinī_.

In each of these environments, the polar, dyadic nature of the visarga is clearly at work.

The sophistication of the tantric treatises, especially the tantric works of Abhinavagupta, is such that they exhibit a great deal of self-consciousness about the nature of language and the use of language as a religious tool. On the technical level, the most potent tantric instrument for liberation is a small unit of language, a mantra. As we have seen, the specific mantra taught by Abhinavagupta in the PTlv is SAUḤ, and it contains the visarga as its final and perhaps most potent element.[8] Abhinavagupta explains the mechanism by which the mantra accomplishes the task of enlightenment in the following way. The individual soul (aṇu), is caught midway between the total inertia of a rock and the omniscience of Bhairava. According to the PTlv, the four sheaths or kañcuka-s are the forces that suspend the aṇu in the middle, like the mythological character Triśaṅku.[9] The PTlv states:

> The Heart is the seed of the Universe devoid of beginning and end, devoid of coming into being and destruction; and because it is a seed, it expands into the form of All, it moves incessantly to expansion. This Heart which moves in the midst of the Lunar

Stations made up of time--of the All--is present in everything in the form of an undifferentiated self-referential consciousness. He should continually meditate on this seed of the Heart as having penetrated into his own Heart, into his consciousness, which is in the form of a lotus flower because it plays at expanding and contracting; he should meditate on this seed which having entered into his consciousness causes it to expand by bringing abut the removal of the form of contraction. In this way there occurs the attainment of Bhairava in all its fullness.[10]

This continuous movement of expansion present in the very core of reality is the visarga. Naturally, the expansion is accompanied by a counterbalancing movement of contraction. The visarga is always conceived in polar, rhythmic terms. This dual nature accounts for its being termed the Rudra-dyad, (the Rudra-yāmala). The PTlv continues:

The initiated one knows this supreme knowledge whose characteristic is the Heart, and which is given by the divinities of Bhairava, who are within the Heart, and who bring an escape from the vibration of manifestation which leads to the obscuring of the Self, and are rather directed towards the supreme vibration which

consists of an opening up of the Self. These same divinities destroy the chief bond which is the state of contraction.[11]

The vibration that leads to manifestation, is, in terms of consciousness, the contractive aspect of the visarga, and the supreme vibration that discloses the self is the expansive aspect of the visarga. Abhinavagupta tells us that the purpose of the mantra is to cause consciousness to vibrate more quickly.[12] Thus, in terms of the mantra, the process involves harnessing the very power that resides in consciousness, and allowing the finite mind to vibrate more quickly, to expand, and to reach the infinitely fast vibration that characterizes the state of Bhairava. The attainment of this state is synonymous with the condition of jīvanmukta. It is in this way that Abhinavagupta explains the theoretical underpinnings of the Śāmbhavopāya. The method that relates to Śiva or to Śambhu (Śāmbhava), employs nothing else but the visarga, which can here be understood as an impulse or power within the Heart. This power begins to operate to lead the sādhaka towards the Ultimate once consciousness has been successfully doubled back upon itself. Once the sādhaka has reached this stage, he has become a vīra, a spiritual hero, who is able to unite with

the Goddess. He is one who is able to surrender gracefully, completely, and effortlessly to that centripetal motion of the Heart, the gravitational pull of consciousness on itself, which plunges him back into the depths of the ocean of consciousness. The vīra may, at this point, if he so desires, consolidate this unification with the inner Goddess in the context of the secret ritual known as the kula-yāga.[13]

IV. HṚDAYAṄGAMĪBHŪTA: EXPERIENTIAL REPLICATION

We now turn to a single passage of the PTlv which addresses the concept of "experiential replication." This passage occurs in the comment to the first two verses of the āgamic "base-text." In these first two verses the Goddess implores Bhairava to reveal to her the great secret of the power that abides in the Heart. In his commentary Abhinavagupta first presents the view of the pūrvapakṣin who questions the necessity for any kind of revelation. The objector bases his argument on the ground that if it is agreed that the Self is already shining in the Heart of all beings, then there is no need for Bhairava to reveal it. Abhinavagupta responds to this objection by saying:

> True, but even though it shines there, it has not truly become a conscious apprehension. Without conscious apprehension, even if a thing exists, it is as if it did not exist, just like the leaves and grass and other things when riding in a chariot. The question is thus appropriate because contentment is not possible without a conscious realization. Contentment (tṛpti) is of two kinds. The first is effected by means of absorption (samāveśa) and consists of magical powers. The second is attained by reaching a condition of

> conscious heart-felt realization, and it is the state of being liberated while still alive.[1]

The operative phrase in this passage is "conscious apprehension" or "conscious realization" which translates the Sanskrit *hṛdayaṅgamībhūta*. This compound literally means "has become something that moves in the Heart." It has also been rendered as "a condition of conscious heart-felt realization." The argument that Abhinavagupta puts forward seems to be that even if we agree that in their innermost recesses all beings are essentially constituted by, and identical with, Śiva, there remains a crucial difference between unconsciously being something and consciously taking possession of one's true status. In the one case, the finite self, ignorant of its identity with Śiva, suffers bondage and limitation. In the other case, conscious realization of the true status of the perceiver (*grāhaka*) generates a transformative and empowering effect.

By using the term *hṛdayaṅgamībhūta* Abhinavagupta underscores certain important characteristics of the Kaula notions about liberation. The Kaula *mokṣa* operates a fundamental transformation of the experience of the *sādhaka*, that is to say there is a primacy of the experiential dimension. However, the attainment of *mokṣa*

as an epistemological rather than ontological event, and once it is attained it represents an active rather than a passive condition. In terms of the finite self, the liberation aimed at by the Kaulas represents a process of expansion rather than a process of contraction. Finally, in terms of the finite world, the Kaula mokṣa operates an integrative and transformative effect rather than a separative and destructive one.

We will consider these statements one by one. It is important to emphasize that the "conscious realization" referred to is not simply a process of assenting intellectually to or affirming belief in a religious doctrine. No doubt, comprehension and faith may constitute important first steps in the process of gaining liberation. Nevertheless, it should be clear that to "become something that moves in the Heart" cannot be reduced to "having an idea in the mind."

The process of recognition of one's identity with Śiva (pratyabhijñā) is simply the experiential awakening to a pre-existing condition. Consequently, from an ontological perspective, when freedom is gained nothing has really changed. What has always been continues to be. Yet, epistemologically, the awakening to a conscious realization of the true situation is powerfully

liberating. Everything changes. Indeed, it is as a result of this heart-felt realization that the state of jīvanmukti is said to arise. It should be noted that perhaps these philosophical categories imported from Western thought are subtly distortive here. Śiva's being (prakāśa) is essentially constituted of a consciousness that is continuously self-referential (vimarśa). Thus, while it remains true that awakening to enlightenment is essentially an experiential, epistemological event, which does not in any way alter Śiva's being qua Śiva, it is equally true that this event is powerfully transformative of the "being" of the sādhaka. The siddha "is" no longer the same, and this new status will reflect itself not only in terms of a transformed vision of the self and of the phenomenal universe, but also in the attainment of a divinized condition of physical embodiment.

The power which moves in the Heart is the visarga-śakti--the emissional power, the spanda--vibration. The process of conscious realization involves the awakening to and grasping of this innate power of the Ultimate. It is this power which increasingly overwhelms the finite self with the infinity of Śiva. The process of attaining Śiva may rightly be described as passive in the sense that it involves, according to the Kaula method of the

Śāmbhavopāya, a progressively and increasingly effortless immersion (nimajjana), or reposing (viśrānti) in the abyss of the Heart, a term functionally equivalent with the immanent Śiva-who-is-consciousness.[2] When the experience of realization matures sufficiently the sādhaka may rightly utter the startling assertion, "I am Śiva" (Śivo'ham). However, this assertion claims for the awakened siddha not just an intrinsic and passive "oneness" with the essence of Śiva, but an active attainment of the five functions or powers (pañcakṛtya) of Śiva as well.[3] This active appropriation of the condition of Śiva is alluded to in the above quoted passage Abhinavagupta merely alludes to it when he describes the condition obtained as a result of the transmission of knowledge as a state of contentment (tṛpti) which is said to be of two kinds. The first occurs as a result of absorption (samāveśa) and results in the attainment of magical powers (vibhūti). The second kind of contentment is brought about by the achievement of the condition of conscious heart-felt realization and results in the attainment of life-in-freedom.

The attainment of the Heart corresponds to the attainment of the liberating power of Śiva which grants freedom and unveils the ultimate reality. The first

moment of this realization occurs in an implosive enstatic recognition of an inner identity with Śiva. Abhinavagupta describes the astounding unity-in-difference that characterizes life-in-freedom.[4] The finite self attains liberation and experiences itself as indissolubly united with the totality. The individual self expands to experience itself as the perfectly fulfilled egoity (*pūrṇāhantā*), and in so doing comes to the experience of astonishment (*camatkāra*) inherent in this amazing "transformation" into the universal self. Abhinavagupta often plays with the opposition between expansion and contraction (*saṃkoca-vikāsa*). The "expansion" that leads to the manifestation of the world occurs as a result of the "contraction" of Śiva into finiteness, into the finite selves (*aṇu*). The meditatively achieved "expansion" of the finite self results in the "contraction" of the finite world's "expansion", and the de-contraction of the finite self back into Śiva.[5]

Thus, "to move in the Heart" refers, to begin with, to an inner grasping of the *śakti* which opens the *sādhaka* to identity with Śiva. By uniting with the Goddess, the *sādhaka* is said to be "born of the Yoginī's Heart", that is, to be reborn as Śiva.[6] For the Kaula lineage this refers to the attainment of certain macranthropic

experiences. The *sādhaka* truly comes to embody the cosmos. The capacity to experience finite objects is not lost; instead, objects are now seen as "luminous with the play that bestows the fragrance of the Self."[7] The astonishment of the experience involves not just the discovery that Śiva, the universal Self, is the true inner identity, but also the bewildering perception that this non-differentiated Self is simultaneously lightly at play as a luminosity inherent in all external objects. In this way, the *jīvanmukta* "moves in the Heart", in the sense that he now experiences the fact that he has his life and being *within* the omnipresent reality of the Heart, of Śiva. He comes to realize that he is surrounded by Śiva on all sides, and that what he formerly "perceived" as separate, finite objects have now revealed their true status as simply Śiva himself. This is *one* of the meanings of the tantric formulation, present in the *PTlv*, which integrates the usually opposed concepts of "enjoyment" and liberation (*bhukti-mukti*). The highest meaning of "enjoyment" is in fact the living of the blissful state of liberation itself. Thus we may contrast the Kaula *mokṣa* to the separative *kaivalya* of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga systems, or what may be characterized as the "destructive" end of *māyā* in the *mokṣa* of Advaitic

formulations. In distinct contrast to moksa-s which operate an isolative, absorptive, sublative, or perhaps even destructive effect on samsāra, the Kaula moksa transforms the finite world just as it integrates it to the reality of Śiva.

There is a final sense to the notion of moving in the Heart. It is in order to underscore this particular connotation that the rendering "experiential replication" was chosen. The notion of "replication" refers to a crucial aspect of the relationship between the Kaula guru and the sādhaka. Essentially, there occurs a "movement" within the Ultimate as the experience of enlightenment displaces the condition of ignorance. According to the Kaula tradition the awakening from ignorance to enlightenment may be seen both as a movement in the Heart occuring within an individual, but also as a movement of reality from the Kaula guru to the disciple.[8] The absolute reality of Śiva spreads out, as it were. Śiva, who has come to apprehend himself as Śiva within the experiential framework of the life of the guru, replicates Himself in the experience of the disciple. For the Kaula tradition, this continuous flux of enlightenment from the center to the periphery is known as the descent of the śakti (saktipāta).[9] It is this śakti, the Goddess, who is

said to be continuously established and moving in the Heart. Thus, by the unceasing movement of reality within itself, finite beings first ignorantly apprehend themselves as finite, and then come to know themselves as infinite. In this fashion the experience of enlightenment, of Śiva, replicates itself unceasingly as a function of the activity of the Goddess.

V. BORN OF THE YOGINĪ'S HEART: MEDITATION AND RITUAL

The method outlined by Abhinavagupta in the PTlv emphasizes the primacy of the direct experience of the Heart through the mantra. Meditation on the mantra will bring the practitioner to a state of direct knowledge of the ultimate reality[1], as well as bringing him the capacity to have detailed knowledge of all finite things, past and future.[2] The direct, meditative absorption in the Heart is said to fulfill the purpose of any ritual.[3] Indeed, the entrance into the Heart constitutes initiation, even if the actual ritual of initiation has not been performed. [4] Moreover, as a result of the direct knowledge of the ultimate reality of the Heart, the practitioner gains essential knowledge about all rituals, even if he does not know the specific rules for the various rituals. [5] Most importantly, all of the rituals surrounding the entrusting and transmission of the mantra are said to be "of no use whatsoever".[6] The practitioner who has been "born of the yoginī" automatically becomes an expert in the rituals of all schools, not necessarily because he has come to know the ritual regulations of each of the schools in detail, but rather because he comes to know the so-called "Method of the Ultimate" (anuttara-vidhi).[7] Says Abhinavagupta, "with respect to the

Ultimate, which is only consciousness, all other things are extraneous."[8]

It is in the light of these rather strong statements in favor of the primacy of direct meditative knowledge of the Heart that it becomes urgent to attempt a conceptual reconciliation of the relationship between meditation and ritual as conceived by Abhinavagupta. Despite the teaching of the Śāmbhavopaya, a great variety of rituals continue to be practiced. We may properly ask ourselves why it is that many of Abhinavagupta's other texts, especially the Tantrāloka, are full of descriptions of elaborate tantric rituals.[9] Even more puzzling is the fact that in the PTlv itself an entire section of the commentary is devoted to a description of various ritual procedures (vidhi), including sacrifice (yāga, yajana), adoration (pūjā), and oblation (homa).[10] How are we to understand the inclusion of this description of ritual in a text devoted almost exclusively to meditation practices, especially when the claim is made that these meditation practices surpass and obviate all ritual? To put the matter in more general terms, what light can this text shed on the relationship between the "inner" practices of the tantra and the "outer" practices?

The method I will follow in this last section will

be to present three approaches to the interaction between ritual procedures and meditative absorption. It is hoped that by means of these approaches the apparent discrepancy outlined above will come to be understood in terms of Abhinavagupta's intricate interweaving of these two dimensions of religious practice. In a sense, as we will see meditation and ritual are finally not to be distinguished. They represent two differentiable but finally indivisible aspects of the same tantric sādhana. I now proceed to present these three approaches as possible avenues for further exploration.

1) Ritual as preparation for meditative absorption:
In a longer commentary on the same āgamic verses explained in the PTlv, Abhinavagupta states that the ritual of adoration (pūjā, pūjā-vidhi) prepares those who have not yet received the full and total descent of energy (śaktipāta) to use the mantra successfully.[11] Due to the "peculiar efficacy" (māhātmya) of this particular ritual, says Abhinavagupta, the sādhaka is able to practice fully the technique of "remembering" the mantra, and in this way attains the condition of the Heart, the ultimate reality. Thus, in this context, ritual functions to facilitate meditative absorption (samāveśa, viśrānti, nimīlana samādhi). It is this

absorption which then discloses the inner dimension of the Heart in its fullness. In addition, absorption brings the practitioner into contact with the emissional power of consciousness (visarga), the primary force which guides the unfolding tantric sādhana.

2) Meditative absorption as preparation for ritual:
The āgamic "base-text" commented upon by Abhinavagupta in the PTlv describes a ritual of "imposition" (nyāsa), giving a few details as follows: One makes "imposition" on various parts of the body: head, face, heart, genitals, and whatever image is to be adored. One then mutters the mantra twenty-seven times, simultaneously binding up the top-knot. The ten regions of space are then bound up, beginning by making three loud hand-claps to remove obstacles. Sanctified water is then sprinkled over the top-knot, the flowers and other ritual implements, the liṅga, and the entire sacrificial surface. In his comment on this passage Abhinavagupta concentrates almost exclusively on the notion of appropriation (svīkaraṇa).[12] For him, the significance of the ritual is that it involves a process of reducing the external constituents of the ritual to a state of identity with the ultimate reality of the Heart. The successful performance of the ritual of imposition is the prerequisite for the true

practice of the ritual of adoration. In order to perform the process of appropriation central to the rite of imposition (as opposed to merely simulating it, or imagining it), the tantric "hero" (vīra) must have already received the śaktipāta that "decontracts" his consciousness. Only when the contraction of the finite self (aṇu) has ceased is the vīra fully qualified to perform, in its truest sense, the ritual of imposition which prepares the necessary preconditions that permit the true practice of adoration.

Thus, the rituals of imposition and adoration serve the vīra as a stage upon which to extend his inner vision of the unity of all things within Śiva-who-is-consciousness. It is precisely by "appropriating" all things to the Heart that the vision of inner unity is extended outwards. In these rituals the vīra finds an arena for solidifying the unitive vision acquired during meditative absorption. The rituals serve to extend and expand this inner vision of unity to include all the external constituents of the ritual. They serve as a context within which the vīra will eventually attain the advanced form of meditative realization known as the extrovertive samādhi (unmīlana samādhi).[13]

3) The Convergence of ritual and meditation:

In the first case considered above, ritual "opens the door" of meditative absorption. In the second case, a rather advanced degree of meditative realization is necessary for the true performance of the ritual. In this second case rituals have been transformed from merely "external" performances into extensions and continuations of the state of meditative realization itself. As a result, in the tantric sādhana described by Abhinavagupta, the relationship of meditation and ritual seems to be one of almost complete interdependence. It might almost be described as being symbiotic in nature. The true performance of one requires a high degree of proficiency in the other. The successful practice of one deepens and enhances the performance of the other. Synergistically "feeding" one upon the other, the two "wings" of external and internal tantric practice advance the vīra along the path of sādhana. In so doing, ritual and meditation have a tendency to converge, to merge one with the other, until the boundary or distinction between these two categories blurs and fades. To present this process of convergence in detail would require more space than we have available. We may mention as an example, however, a ritual described by Abhinavagupta in the Tantrāloka for the empowerment of a new teacher.[14] If our interpretation of this passage is

correct, it seems that in this very important ritual, there do not occur any "external" actions on the part of the teacher or disciple whatsoever. Rather, ritual has here become a context for "sacred action" in which the reality that has been intuitively apprehended in the silence of meditative absorption is now silently manipulated in order to be transmitted to the disciple. Once again, the distinction between "outer" practices and "inner" attainments has become blurred. Nevertheless, the convergence of ritual and meditation is quite in accordance with the avowed aim of the tantric sādhana which is described as a condition in which all things are "of one taste" (ekarasa).[15]

In the Tantrāloka), Abhinavagupta describes a meditation using terms and images drawn from a fire-ritual: the two fire-sticks are rubbed together in order to inflame the sacred fire-pit of Bhairava.[16] This meditation essentially consists in visualizing the entire universe reduced to the wheel of pure consciousness, and then, rehearsing the process by which the entire universe once again emerges. The siddha is said to have become identified with Bhairava when he actually comes to experience the continuous emanation and reabsorption of the universe from his consciousness. In order to achieve

this condition of Bhairava the *siddha* employs ritualized meditations and meditative rituals which serve as arenas for manifesting his identification with Bhairava. These practices become the context within which the *siddha* exercises and tests his attainment of the powers of manifestation, maintenance, and reabsorption of the universe. As the mutually enhancing practices of meditation and ritual deepen, they provide a context for "sacred action" which tests the authenticity and intensity of religious attainment and which is both deeply meditative and highly ritualized in nature.

The precise balance between meditation and ritual in Abhinavagupta descriptions of *sādhana* seems to depend on at least three factors:

1) The particular method (*upāya*) that the *sādhaka* is employing: The method, in turn, will depend on the teacher's ascertainment of the degree of *śaktipāta* that the *sādhaka* has received. Thus, only the most highly qualified disciples would be able to employ successfully the *Śāmbhavopāya* described in the *PTlv*. For them, and them alone, the great majority of ritual practices seem to have become useless. Nevertheless, it is for these highly advanced disciples that the tradition teaches the eroticized secret ritual known as the *kula-yāga*. For

other, less favored, practitioners, the rituals will serve to enhance and develop whatever meditative skills they may have.[17]

2) The goal of the sādhaka: Sādhana may be undertaken for the attainment of mokṣa, for the attainment of particular desires (bhoga), or for a combination of the two. For those practitioners undertaking sādhana only for the attainment of mokṣa, the precision of the regulations established for the performance of ritual lose their importance. The only important element in this case is that every aspect of ritual be such that it causes joy in the Heart. Those who aim at the fruition of specific desires, on the other hand, must attend closely to the precise details for the performance of each specific ritual.[18]

3) Is the sādhaka pursuing the attainment of the introvertive (nimīlana) or the extrovertive (unmīlana) samādhi?: The introvertive samādhi is attained by an emphasis on meditative absorption. The extrovertive samādhi is achieved by meditatively performed ritual. These samādhi-s are pursued precisely in order that the polarity between inner and outer be overcome. The alternation between a contraction of the manifested universe into the silent witnessing consciousness, and the

expansion of that universe again out of consciousness, constitutes the essential structure of the tantric sādhana. Thus, it is in the dialectical relationship between meditation and ritual, in the repeated alternation between the inner and outer practices, that the sādhana advances towards its unifying goal.